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The Council Connection

your connection to City Council by Mayor Justin M. Wilson

November 1, 2022

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This will be a busy month in Alexandria!

This Saturday, the City Council will have our annual budget retreat. This is the first step of the next FY 2024 budget as we receive the first peek at the revenues and expenditure pressures we will grapple with in the Spring. [The public is welcome to attend in person or virtually to watch the Council discussions.](#)

[Art on the Avenue](#), the fall tradition that brings tens of thousands of people and arts, music, food and children's activities to Mount Vernon Avenue in Del Ray was rescheduled due to Hurricane Ian. The

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festival returns on Saturday November 12th.

The [same weekend is the Alexandria Film Festival, with screenings occurring in-person and online.](#)

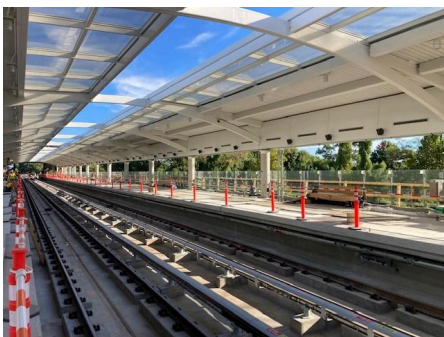
The following weekend is the traditional start of the holiday season in Old Town, with the [Holiday Tree Lighting in Market Square on Saturday November 19th at 6 PM.](#)

[Thanksgiving brings the return of the 47th Annual Alexandria Turkey Trot, a 5-mile run through Del Ray and Rosemont with thousands of your friends and neighbors.](#)

After two years of doing virtual town-hall meetings, including weekly sessions during most of 2020, I am moving back to in-person, "Living Room Town Hall" meetings. If you would like to host a town hall in your neighborhood, [please drop me a line](#) and we'll get it on the calendar!

[Contact me anytime.](#) Let me know how I can help.

Initiatives and Updates



Metro Rail Station Closure

Late last month [a Metro Rail train travelled through the new Potomac Yard station for the first time ever.](#) This short trip on the brand-new section of track commenced a period of intense testing as the new track section is tested to ensure it is ready for revenue service.

This is a significant accomplishment and represents a large milestone as we near the opening of the new station.

Additionally, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) [announced that they had received approval to restore more of their fleet of 7000-series Metro Rail cars that have been sidelined due to safety concerns.](#)

That's the good news.

The bad news is that for most of September and all of October the Metro Rail stations that serve Alexandria have again been cut off from the rest of the system. On Sunday, [the Blue Line is scheduled to return as Alexandria's stations return to service.](#)

In June, [WMATA released their plan for travel alternatives during the extensive Yellow and Blue Line work that began in September.](#) The plan in place includes new free shuttle routes and reduced Blue Line headways. [The Virginia Railway Express has also been providing completely free service in September and October for trips to and from Alexandria.](#) The City has also worked to supplement these options with [free Capital Bike Share and expanded water taxi service.](#)

The first phase of this shutdown is one that we expected and eagerly anticipated. In order to connect the newly-constructed Potomac Yard Metro Station, rail service south of the National Airport station was intended to be shutdown for 6 weeks from September 10th until October 22nd.

The second impact was not anticipated. The rehabilitation of the Yellow Line bridge and the adjacent tunnels, requires a shutdown of the bridge for 8 months, which also began on September 10th.

At the end of September, [we were dismayed to learn from WMATA that the first phase of work has been extended for another two weeks, with Alexandria's Metro Stations now scheduled to reopen \(with only the Blue Line\) on Sunday November 6th.](#)

To make matters even more frustrating, WMATA has also announced an additional delay, of indeterminate length, for the planned opening of the Potomac Yard Metro. While the opening had been scheduled for late November (itself a significantly delayed date), it has now been pushed into 2023.

[To say that the City is disappointed in WMATA's management of this project would be an understatement.](#) We have made specific requests of new oversight, new accountability and transparency from WMATA and will push the agency to complete this project as soon as possible, while addressing the significant financial impacts the City has borne as a result of WMATA's failures.

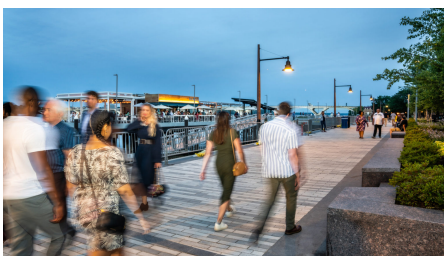
Since this announcement, I have met personally with WMATA leadership regularly and we expect to have a new opening date for the Potomac Yard station announced in early December.

These closures have again cut Alexandria off from the rest of the system and they are significantly impacting

Alexandria transit riders at a time when the City and its regional partners have been working to bring our residents back to transit.

The work to restore Metro back to the level required to support this region continues. In the short-term, additional sacrifice will be required. As a regular Metro rider myself, I know the service challenges first-hand.

With new leadership and major infrastructure investment, I am optimistic that these efforts will result in a more reliable system for Alexandria and the entire region. It is essential that this region have a credible transit system that can serve the needs of our community.



Tourism Returns to Alexandria

Each fall, we have the annual meeting of [Visit Alexandria](#), Alexandria's convention and visitors association. Under normal circumstances, this is the time when we discuss the success of the City's travel and hospitality industry. In 2019, we were noting a record \$859 million of visitor spending easing the burden on Alexandria's local taxpayers.

In 2020, that visitor spending dropped in half to \$445 million, as the pandemic ravaged our local economy:

- In April of 2019, our local sales tax revenue exceeded \$2.5 million. In April of 2020, it fell to \$2 million.
- In April of 2019, our dining tax revenue was over \$2 million. In April of 2020, it fell to just barely over a half million.
- In April of 2019, our transient lodging (hotel) tax revenue was \$1.4 million. In April of 2020, it fell to less than \$200,000.

Unfortunately, the carnage had very real human impacts. In April of 2020, the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) reported over 7,000 initial unemployment claims for Alexandria. Most of the employees impacted were those who worked in the travel and hospitality industry.

Last month we had the 2022 Annual Meeting of Visit Alexandria, which showed a picture of recovery:

- Visitor spending is projected to rebound to \$676 million this year.
- As of September, there were less than 2,500 residents unemployed through the City, with 2.5% unemployment.
- Sales tax revenue in June (the most recent month available) approached \$3.5 million,

significantly higher than the same month in 2019.

- Meals tax revenue has now exceeded 2019 levels for over a year.
- Hotel tax revenue nearly matched 2019 levels in July for the first time.

It has been the creativity of business leaders around our City, the tireless work of their dedicated employees and the partnership with government that has led our local economy into recovery.

We still have work to do, but we have made considerable progress from the dark days of 2020. Our City government will continue our efforts to restore our local economy.



Early Voting Continues

Saturday is the final day to vote early before Election Day, a week from today.

So far 4,948 voters have returned ballots by mail, 6,853 voters have voted in person, and an additional 4,993 voters have received ballots by mail but have not yet returned them. The 11,801 voters who have already voted exceeds the TOTAL early voters from 4 years ago.

On November 8th, Alexandria voters will only have one office on our ballots: election of our representative in the United States House of Representatives.

On Tuesday November 8th, all City polling places will be open from 6 AM until 7 PM for the General Election.

The sample ballot is now available for your review online.

Two years ago, Virginia introduced "no-excuse" early voting, so voters have three choices to vote this November:

1. If you have a ballot that was mailed to you, the ballot can be mailed back or dropped 24/7 at the drop-box located in front of 132 N. Royal Street, or at drop-boxes that will be located at each precinct on Election Day.
2. **You can vote in person at the Alexandria Registrar's Office, Today, tomorrow and Thursday from 8 AM until 8 PM.** On Friday and Saturday, the office will host voting from 8 AM until 5 PM.
3. Voting will also be available at Beatley Library (5005 Duke Street) **today, tomorrow and Thursday from 1 PM until 8 PM, Friday from 1 PM until 5 PM and Saturday from 10 AM until 5 PM.**

4. You can vote in person **at your precinct** on the General Election day of November 8th.

I'll see you at the polls!



Flood Mitigation/Reducing Pollution

Two and a half years ago, the Commonwealth of Virginia joined 11 other states to become a member of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). **RGGI is a consortium of states that have agreed to create a "cap-and-invest" marketplace.** In the RGGI region, the states impose limits on CO₂ emissions for power plants, but allow the purchase and sale of credits for these emissions.

The revenues from the sale of these "pollution allowances" are used in Virginia to fund projects around the Commonwealth to address flooding and storm surge and to support low-income residents seeking to make their homes more energy efficient.

Since the first auction in March 2021, Virginia has received \$452 million from this program. The flooding mitigation funds are awarded by the **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation through its Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund.**

Alexandria has sought funds in each of the three competitive rounds and we have been awarded funds all 3 times.

- In the first round, the City was awarded \$115,200 to support **a stormwater capacity project along Commonwealth Avenue and Glebe Road.**
- In the second round, the City **was awarded \$3.2 million for waterfront flood mitigation work and \$516,000 for Arlandria flood mitigation projects.**
- In the third and most recent round, the City was **awarded \$764,000 to improve the capacity of storm sewer inlets around the City and \$1.2 million to replace a metal pipe culvert in Arlandria.**

Last month in this newsletter I provided an update on our overall flood resiliency efforts. Addressing this challenge requires immediate and sustained action in the following areas:

- Infrastructure Investment and Maintenance
- Financial and Technical Assistance to Residents
- Development Policy Reform

Earlier this year, the City Council unanimously adopted **an ordinance to again increase our**

Stormwater Utility Fee, to further increase the resources available for investments in our storm sewer infrastructure. This increase will mean a condo owner will pay \$82.32 annually, a townhouse owner \$123.48 annually, a small single-family homeowner \$294 annually and a large single-family homeowner \$490.98 annually.

The Stormwater Utility Fee revenue, paid by all property owners in the City (including non-taxable properties), will allow for an acceleration of major capacity projects and "spot improvements," an increase in channel maintenance, new "state-of-good repair" investments, property owner grants and new staffing in support of these projects and the system.

This increases of the fee over the past two years has allowed the City to quadrupled the planned investment in stormwater mitigation since 2020 and **support a newly accelerated 10-year program of investments.**

Our new **"Flood Action Alexandria Projects Dashboard"** allows resident to navigate the location and status of the projects funded by these resources.

Yet, we cannot do this alone. RGGI has been a critical funding source for the City's flood mitigation work, using a revenue derived from pollution to fund projects addressing the impacts of climate change. This is a vital resource for Alexandria.

Unfortunately, Governor Glenn Youngkin is attempting to withdraw Virginia from RGGI. In addition to being bad for our environment, removing the Commonwealth from RGGI will also remove a vital funding source for communities around the Commonwealth for addressing the impacts of flooding and severe weather.

The City provided formal input to the Commonwealth last month formally opposing the Governor's effort. We are hopeful his administration will abandon this reckless effort.



New Affordable Housing

Just over 3 years ago, the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) unanimously adopted new regional housing creation targets. This is the first regional commitment to accelerate the development of housing supply as a means to address our affordability crisis.

These targets commit the City to the creation of additional units, with most of those units committed to be affordable for low to middle income households. To

ensure that this housing creation does not exacerbate existing transportation challenges, most of this new housing must be located near job centers and high-capacity transportation infrastructure.

In March of 2020, the City Council became the third jurisdiction in the region to endorse these targets.

In 2013, while adopting our **Housing Master Plan**, City Council set an ambitious goal to create or preserve 2,000 affordable units by 2025. **We are on track to meet this goal.**

With Council's unanimous adoption of the COG targets, we will increase our current target of 200 units per year to 325 affordable units per year.

I served on the COG Housing Strategy Group which developed these recommended targets, along with elected officials from Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. The groundwork for this effort was laid in September of 2018, when the Board of Directors of COG **accepted a report that identified that 100,000 additional housing units will need to be constructed within the region just to meet expected job growth.** That is 100,000 units BEYOND what is already planned to be developed.

During our budget process in the spring, our staff provided **an update of the pipeline of new committed affordable housing around the City.** The last year has been very busy on this effort:

- **Last month, we gathered at the corner of King and Menokin to celebrate the opening of "The Waypoint at Fairlington."** This partnership with Wesley Housing and Fairlington Presbyterian Church created 81 new units of committed affordable housing where there used to be an asphalt parking lot.
- Tonight, **our Planning Commission will be hearing an application** for the construction of 94 units of committed affordable housing on the site of a car dealership at 2712 Duke Street. This project is being proposed by **Community Housing Partners, a housing non-profit based in Christiansburg.**
- Early next year, the Planning Commission and City Council will consider approvals for the redevelopment of the Samuel Madden Homes. Samuel Madden is currently a 66-unit public housing development owned by the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA). **This redevelopment would replace this property 532 total units, 326 of which will be committed affordable units and 206 market-rate units.**

- Earlier this year, the City Council unanimously approved a proposal by the **Alexandria Housing Development Corporation (AHDC) to develop 474 committed affordable and workforce units in Arlandria at the corner of Glebe and Mount Vernon.** This is the site of a former Safeway and an office building bought by the City 2 decades ago, demolished and used as a parking lot as an interim use.
- Also earlier this year, the City' Council approved an application by another housing non-profit, **Wesley Housing Development Corporation, to build 373 committed affordable housing units at Parcview on Holmes Run Parkway.**
- In December, the City Council unanimously approved **a separate proposal by AHDC to develop 36 affordable homeownership units (31 townhomes and 5 condominiums) and 3 flats to be operated by Sheltered Homes of Alexandria for 12 residents. This project is located on Seminary Road just east of the City's Fire Station.**
- Early next year, the Planning Commission and City Council **will consider an application from Community Lodgings, an Alexandria non-profit, to redevelop an existing 28-apartment affordable housing complex into a new 91-unit affordable-housing development.**
- In January, **Wesley Housing used resources from Amazon's Housing Equity Fund and a loan from Housing Partnership Fund, to purchase 66 private units in Arlandria and preserve them as affordable, with future redevelopment plans to come.**

The City will continue to seek creative partnerships, new land-use tools and innovative financing to preserve and create affordability in our City. I am pleased to see these efforts come to fruition.

A Pilgrimage to Alabama

Last month, **I was able to join over 160 Alexandrians on a pilgrimage to Montgomery, Alabama as part of our effort to commemorate the documented race-terror lynchings that occurred in Alexandria.**

In August, 123 years ago, at the corner of King and Fairfax Streets in Old Town, **an angry mob of white Alexandrians lynched Benjamin Thomas**, a 16-year old African-American boy. Young Benjamin had been arrested the day before, accused erroneously of assaulting a child. While several African-Americans were arrested and punished for attempting to prevent the lynching, no person ever faced justice for the murder of Benjamin Thomas.



Only two years prior, on April 23, 1897, Joseph McCoy, [an 18-year old African-American was also lynched by an angry white mob, on the corner of Lee Street and Cameron Street in Old Town.](#)

Without effort, the deaths of Benjamin and Joseph will be just another two victims of a multi-decade campaign of racial terror that took the lives of at least 4,400 African-Americans across 20 states from end of Reconstruction in 1877 through 1950.

Our community has rightly demanded more. A few years ago, led by dedicated community volunteers and the staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria, [we commenced the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project.](#) Our local effort is part of the [Equal Justice Initiative's Community Remembrance Project](#), based in Montgomery, Alabama,

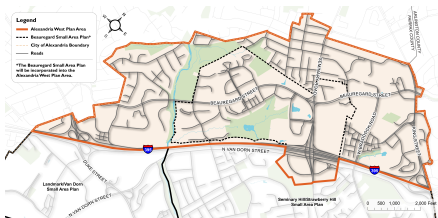
This process seeks not only to ensure that Benjamin and Joseph are not lost to history, but more ambitiously to grapple with the systems that have reinforced white supremacy throughout our City's existence.

For the past few years, [we have held annual remembrances for both Joseph and Benjamin which have drawn many Alexandrians and educated our community.](#)

The trip to Alabama was a powerful experience, made even more powerful by sharing it with a group of committed Alexandrians, including Alexandria City High School students.

For a few days, we visited sacred sites and worked to connect the murder of Benjamin and Joseph to the broader context of history as well as the modern-day issues we grapple with today.

The pilgrimage was not a conclusion of this project. It was an inflection point. I look forward to the difficult work ahead, of reconciliation and learning.



Alexandria West Plan

The City's Master Plan is made up of [18 Small Area Plans](#) and several Citywide sub-plans (Transportation, Housing, Open Space, etc). This is how the City meets [the obligations of state law to adopt and update a comprehensive plan.](#)

Over 21 years ago ago, the City Council adopted ["Plan for Planning,"](#) a vision for how the community could proactively work to get ahead of development pressures

and ensure that our community's vision would shape transition in our neighborhoods.

Since that time, the City has been revising and modernizing these Small Area Plans, working intensely with different neighborhoods around the City to adopt a vision for the future of our community.

But no plan is worth the effort if the City will not implement what was planned. Over the past several years the City has worked to improve our efforts to implement plans and policy goals in a variety of areas. [To provide accountability for those efforts, the City recently published a report detailing the status of implementation of the most significant City planning initiatives.](#)

Before our recess, the Council adopted our [Interdepartmental Planning Work Program](#), reflecting the planning efforts that will be accomplished in the near-term.

In September, I provided information about our planned fall kick-off of community engagement for an Alexandria "Vision Plan," which will craft an updated community vision for our City's future. This will ultimately update our Master Plan, future Small Area Plans, and our zoning ordinance.

But more immediately, this month we will kick off the comprehensive update of the Alexandria West Small Area Plan. This plan will encompass [a wide swath of our City, the entire northwest corner.](#)

This planning process presents a unique opportunity for Alexandria's residents to shape the future of this significant portion of our City. We want your input!

[There will be several opportunities to provide input using meetings and surveys this month.](#)

I am excited to see these neighborhood planning efforts moving forward! I look forward to your input.

Guaranteed Income Pilot Begins

Yesterday, [the City began accepting applications for ARISE, our guaranteed income pilot program.](#) We will be accepting applications until November 9th. [You can learn more about this pilot program on our site.](#)

A little over 52 years ago, [the New York Times ran an article reviewing the concept of a guaranteed basic income and featuring a guaranteed income program that then-President Nixon had brought to Congress.](#)



The program was championed by Donald Rumsfeld, who was at that time Nixon's Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Rumsfeld was assisted in managing this program by Richard Cheney.

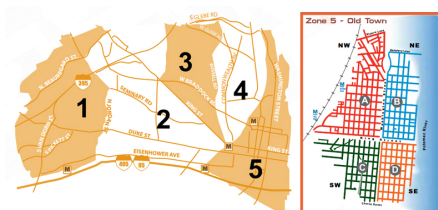
The concept was relatively simple: what if we cut out the bureaucracy of public assistance programs and instead provided a guaranteed monthly income to lower-income populations, without any strings attached? It was driven at that time by a belief that in addition to being costly, the bureaucracy that had been developed to administer our public safety net programs was reducing efficacy of the programs themselves.

Fast forward a few decades, [and there is now a network of municipal governments around the nation experimenting with the concept.](#)

Alexandria has now joined this effort. The City Council approved the allocation of \$3 million from a portion of the City's American Rescue Plan money. The City will provide 170 families with a \$500 per month debit card. This program will last for 24 months.

To gauge the result of this effort, the City will provide case management and engage a research partner. Ultimately, the goal of the effort is to improve the economic stability of lower-income families.

I am hopeful that the City can also glean lessons from this experiment to better guide how we administer other programs designed to alleviate poverty in the future.



Leaf Collection Begins

[Alexandria's annual leaf collection began yesterday!](#) Check online to learn your collection date.

Leaf vacuuming will proceed to each of the designated zones beginning on the scheduled dates. Each zone will take several days to complete.

Additionally, the City is making up to 15 leaf bags available for each residential household. The bags can be picked up at City Hall, the City's self-service shed at the corner of Roth and Business Center Drive or at Charles Houston, Chinquapin, Patrick Henry or Mount Vernon Recreation Centers.

These leaf bags can be placed out for collection on your regulation collection day.

Holmes Run Trail Update

The back to back flooding events in July of 2018 and 2019 undermined the Holmes Run Trail and bridges



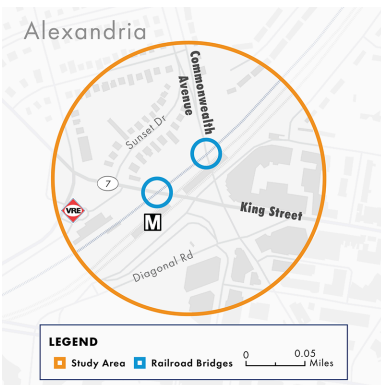
along the trail. Since that time, this important community resource has been unavailable.

With pandemic delays behind us and budget available, the City is now working to bring this trail back to our residents.

The work has been divided into a few phases. The first phase of work is the restoration of the Holmes Run Trail Bridge at 4600 Duke Street. The demolition of the current bridge was completed a year ago, and the stabilization of the bank completed earlier this year. The full replacement is now anticipated to occur this fall into winter.

The more extensive phase of work involves the trail restoration at Dora Kelly Park, the trail restoration at the Morgan Street cul-de-sac and the trail restoration at North Ripley Street. The design work is under way and is expected to be complete early next year. Construction is anticipated to commence in the summer/fall of 2023, with completion in the summer/fall of 2024.

It has been frustrating to have the trail unavailable for so long, but we're working to build a more resilient trail to benefit our community for generations to come!



Alexandria Rail Bridges

For decades, the City has expressed concerns regarding the condition of the railroad bridges owned by CSX that cross King Street and Commonwealth Avenue near Alexandria's Union Station. These bridges form part of a critical rail link for freight and passenger service through our City.

Under the auspices of the new Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA), it is possible that these bridges may finally get a new look. The VPRA is a new entity that was created by the Commonwealth to preside over a massive expansion of rail infrastructure and service for the state.

Earlier this year, the VPRA began a feasibility study to look at the future of these two rail bridges. This study is now on an accelerated timeline that assumes construction beginning as soon as 2024.

The VPRA is seeking input from our community. Tomorrow evening at 6 PM, VPRA is hosting a virtual meeting to provide more information on this study. Sign-up online to participate in this meeting.

These railroad bridges are critical infrastructure for our community, but I am hopeful that this project will lead to aesthetic and functional improvements in support of our City.

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